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Anglicans — Should They go into The Church of Nigeria?

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SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
AT CLAREMONT
California

INTRODUCTION

“December 1965 is the target date for the formation of the united Church of Nigeria, from the Anglican, Methodist and Presbyterian Churches!”

This announcement was a big surprise for most of us. We were not prepared for it. We had not thought of union as something which could happen so soon. Yet probably most of us were not disturbed enough, for very few of us have really faced the issue. *Have you?* This is surely something of such very great importance that it should be the main topic in our Church’s thinking and discussion at the moment. But in practice many Anglicans have hardly thought at all about what Church Union will mean to them. This is a serious situation, and it calls for urgent action.

Fortunately, however, some Anglicans *have* been thinking about it. Here and there criticisms are voiced, and questions asked, about the *Scheme*¹. These can be a very useful encouragement to thought and discussion. So, while the immediate aim of this booklet is to examine these criticisms and questions and to answer them, its larger purpose is to encourage Anglicans to probe thoroughly into the whole matter of Church Union in Nigeria, particularly as it will affect their own Church.

You are therefore invited to consider the following questions and answers one by one, as starting points for your thinking. Then, in the second part of the booklet, you will find a more general discussion of why it is that God appears to be calling us to this tremendously serious step.

¹ *Scheme of Church Union in Nigeria*, published by the Nigeria Church Union Committee, price 1/-. The *Scheme* contains the Basis of Union, the proposed Constitution of the Church of Nigeria, and details of the Inaugural arrangements and services.

P A R T I.

SOME CRITICISMS, QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

1. **What is the point of starting a United Church from only three Churches? Wouldn't it be better to wait until more are ready to come in? It seems misleading to call this new Church 'The Church of Nigeria' when the scheme does not include Roman Catholics, Baptists, etc.**

The answer to the first part of the question is: "Well, you've got to start somewhere." Looking at what has happened in other parts of the world, it seems very unlikely that God plans to give unity in Nigeria by making all the Churches unite simultaneously. The pattern seems to be that there must be centres of unity upon which a wider union of churches can be built. When a pot of water boils, you do not see bubbles over the whole surface all at once. First of all a bubble breaks here, and then there. Then gradually the whole surface begins to move.

As in the United Kingdom, Anglicans in Nigeria have started by having conversations about union with any Churches willing to respond. It is a very great achievement that, by the power of the Holy Spirit, Anglicans, Methodists and Presbyterians have been drawn together. But it would be a painful disappointment if it were to end with that. In South India there have been conversations with Baptists, Lutherans, the Mar Thoma Church and the Episcopal Methodists. There seems a very good chance that the Lutherans may join the Church of South India. And that is what is hoped for here, that by its life and witness and the reality of its fellowship, the United Church would encourage other Churches to apply to join.

As to the *name* chosen for the United Church — obviously it is called the Church of Nigeria as an indication of what is aimed at, not because it claims to contain all the Christians in Nigeria!

In England, the Anglican Church is called 'the Church of England'. Similarly there is a Church of Ireland, while in Scotland the Presbyterian Church is known as the Church

of Scotland. Yet, in fact, only a proportion of the Christians in Britain belong to these Churches. No one seems to object to the names on that account.

2. Can an Anglican feel happy about the doctrine of the proposed Church? It all seems very vague. For example the Scheme says that no one will have to say exactly what he believes to be the authority of the bishop.

This is what the Lambeth Conference of 1958 said about the North India plan and the Ceylon scheme, on which the Nigerian scheme is based:

“Care has been taken on theological issues; and the doctrinal statements of both the Scheme and the Plan are without fault. No Anglican need entertain any doubt concerning the orthodoxy of the faith of the resulting Churches.”

In Chapter III, paragraph 6, of the Constitution of the Church of Nigeria, it is definitely stated that: *“In the preparation of candidates for baptism the Apostles’ Creed (or, if so desired, the Nicene Creed) shall be used as the basis of the necessary instruction.”* The paragraph continues: *“It is not necessary that, in answering questions with regard to their faith, candidates for baptism should use the actual words of either of these Creeds in affirming their belief.”* This is obviously intended to make sure that candidates for baptism do not merely repeat the words in a parrot fashion, but really understand what they are saying they believe.

“No one will have to say exactly what he believes to be the authority of the bishop”: no one doubts the authority of the bishop for one moment. But it is not for each individual member to say exactly what that authority is. It is defined very exactly and clearly in Chapter VI of the Constitution. Section (a) (pp 29-30) *“Functions and Responsibilities of Bishops.”* It is intended that the bishop’s authority shall be laid down constitutionally. That is why the Scheme is so exact on this point.

What is not defined is the *doctrine* of episcopacy. The Anglican Church has always avoided making such a definition. It is a fact that the Anglican Church contains people with very many different views about the meaning of episcopacy — probably far more differences than will be found in the Church of Nigeria.

3. **What will happen to the Book of Common Prayer? Shall we be compelled to change our habits of worship? Presumably a new Church needs a new Prayer Book and new Liturgy?**

The Constitution lays down that "*no form of worship which before union has been in use in any of the uniting Churches shall be forbidden in the Church of Nigeria, nor shall any accustomed forms be changed, or new forms introduced into the worship of any congregation without the agreement of the presbyter and the congregation.*" (Scheme p 22). There is thus no question of our being 'compelled' to depart from the Book of Common Prayer. Apart from one or two special instances, we are authorised to continue our present Church worship unchanged, unless and until we come to believe that God is leading us to enrich our devotions by new forms.

On the other hand it is clearly the intention of the *Scheme* that the members of the new Church should gradually grow together, in forms of worship as in other matters. All that is best in our Prayer Book will certainly be taken over into whatever joint patterns of worship are eventually agreed upon.

Some people feel that it would make the new Church seem more real if there were new forms of worship prepared in advance, which would be introduced into all congregations as soon as union has taken place. But this idea is against the spirit of the *Scheme*, which stresses that real union in such matters will only come slowly through the power of the Holy Spirit. New orders of service must come from within the Church, as its members grow in understanding of each others' traditions and in true unity of spirit. The Archdeacon of Allahabad had this to say about worship in the North India Plan:

"The inauguration of Union cannot be expected to bring about uniformity of worship all at once, even if a complete uniformity were desirable. There will be a breaking down of the barriers which have separated us, and the possibility of a growing together in fellowship, directed by the Synod and

*the Diocesan Councils of the united Church. Each of the uniting Churches has much to contribute and much to learn . . . in methods of worship . . .*¹

The intention of the Church of Nigeria is similar to this. A Liturgical Committee has been formed, and is already at work preparing the ground. As the Archdeacon already quoted also pointed out, the gradual growth of new liturgy and orders of worship gives the opportunity for more indigenous forms to be developed. And many of us, so far from wanting to hold on to the Book of Common Prayer as it stands, look forward to seeing it enriched by such indigenous forms without delay.

¹ Quoted by Bishop Bayne in *Ceylon, North India and Pakistan*, pp. 239.

4. As Anglicans we are members of the world-wide Anglican Communion, and, through the Ecumenical Movement, of the world-wide Church. Isn't there a danger that the new Church will be really only an isolated local sect, cut off from the universal Church? Would its bishops be invited to Lambeth? Would it be a member of the World Council of Churches?

The Committee on Church Unity and the Church Universal of the 1958 Lambeth Conference reported as follows:-

"The Committee feels constrained to make a radical recommendation regarding the membership of future Lambeth Conferences: that when any Church belonging to the Anglican Communion decides, with the encouragement and goodwill of the Lambeth Conference, to join a United Church, the bishops, or representative bishops, of the United Church should be invited to attend Lambeth Conferences as members."

This recommendation has been passed to the President and the Consultative Body for consideration before the next Lambeth Conference. Meanwhile it is stated in the Constitution of the Church of Nigeria (Chapter II paragraph 15):

"The Church of Nigeria will gladly accept invitations to send delegates as visitors to the assemblies or other representative bodies of the Churches through whose labours its constituent groups have come into being."

The word *ecumenical* (world-wide) can be used in two senses. In one sense, the geographical sense, the Anglican Communion is undoubtedly a world-wide, universal Church. But in another sense no Church can claim to be universal (though it is true that, officially, the Romans would still make just that claim.) During the last fifty years all Churches have been coming to realise that each of them has grasped only part of the whole truth. In Nigeria we are trying to come together in a Church which is, in its nature, nearer to this universality that we seek. We want to bring our Anglican contribution into it. The Anglican Church is doing this in many places, and we want to share in the process.

To quote again from the Constitution of the Church of Nigeria (Chapter II paragraph 14):

“The Church of Nigeria, as part of the Church Universal, is prepared to give full weight to the pronouncements of bodies representative of the whole Church, and in particular will desire to take part in the deliberations and decisions of Ecumenical Councils” (e.g. the World Council of Churches.)

The suggestion that the proposed union would result in an ‘isolated local sect’ gives a false picture of the whole world-wide movement towards Church Union. It is quite out of touch with modern Anglican thought. It would be truer to say that those who cling to a narrow loyalty to their own denomination are cutting themselves off from the rest of the Church.

To give one obvious example, Church Union negotiations in Ghana are making good progress. The Anglican Diocese of Accra has a ‘high church tradition’. Would it consider even conversations about reunion if this might mean forming a Church which would be isolated from the world-wide Church?

It is certainly possible that, at the outset, all or parts of the Anglican Communion might feel unable to be in full communion with the Church of Nigeria. In this case there would be a period of “separation”. The Church of Nigeria, on the other hand, hopes that this will not be so and after Toronto has very good reasons for so hoping. It has agreed to accept the advice of the Lambeth Conference, and to follow the Ceylon/North India Scheme, in order that if possible there may be full communion from the outset.¹

In any case, whatever other doubts critics may have about the United Church, they surely must accept that it is committed to the world-wide Church. (See paragraph 14 of the Basis of Union, and Chapter II paragraph 15 of the Constitution). The Presbyterian Church of Nigeria is a member of the World Council of Churches; the Methodist Church, Nigeria has applied for membership, having been a member until 1962 as part of the Methodist Conference in the United Kingdom. On every page of the *Scheme* the idea is brought out that the United Church will be a local expression of the world-wide Church.

¹ It is certain that Anglicans becoming members of the United Church would still be accepted as communicants in the Provinces of the Anglican Communion, and that ministers formerly ordained in the Anglican Church, would still be allowed to exercise their ministry in the Anglican Church. Also, as in the case of South India, the new ordinations of the United Church would be recognized. What we do not know yet is which Provinces (if any) would accept those previously ordained as Methodists and Presbyterians and now “unified”.

5. Why aren't we following the South India Scheme, as was originally suggested?

It is true that at one time it seemed as if we in Nigeria would find that the method of union followed in South India would suit us best. But later, after the Lambeth Conference of 1958, the Anglican members of the Church Union Committee asked for the North India scheme to be followed instead.

The main difference between the two schemes concerns the Ministry. In South India they decided to let the Ministries of the uniting churches grow together slowly. They all accepted one another's ministries as real, and they did not want there to be any suggestion that this was not so. Therefore, when the United Church was first formed, they refused to have any order of service which might make it appear that the ordained ministers of any of the churches were being 'reordained'. This meant that for the first thirty years of the Church's life the Ministry is a mixed one containing ministers ordained in different ways, before union took place. Ministers ordained after the union are members of the new, unified Ministry ordained according to the new rite. At the end of the thirty years all the older ministers will have retired, and the ministry will be made up entirely of men ordained into the Church of South India. Until that time, the Church is not in full communion with some Provinces of the Anglican Church.

But in the North India Scheme, the ministers of the uniting churches meet together right at the start of the United Church. They lay hands on one another in order to receive together a new commissioning from God. They each accept one another's ministers as real, already, but they receive something new, together, and the ministry is unified from the very beginning. This means, among other things, that the United Church will probably be able to be in full communion with the Anglican Church straight away.

In fact neither the Presbyterian Church nor the Methodist Church in Nigeria were altogether happy about changing to the North India pattern. But because the Anglicans wanted it so much they agreed, in the interests of unity.

6. It seems that the new Church will be a huge, centralised organization. Won't that make it very bulky and clumsy, and probably inefficient? We have enough of bureaucracy in secular things nowadays. Why bring it into the Church?

This idea seems quite common among critics of the *Scheme*, but it is false. There is not a word in the *Scheme* which suggests this over-centralisation. The unit of government is to be the diocese, as in the present Anglican Province of West Africa which no one has ever, surely, accused of being an over-centralised body. The dioceses will be a good deal smaller than the present Anglican ones. They will be small enough and independent enough to be extremely efficient, and the Church as a whole will be very flexible.

The Synod of the whole Church is described in chapter IX of the Constitution (p. 40-42 of the *Scheme*) and its powers are carefully defined. Paragraph 17 reads:

"The Synod shall deal with matters of common interest to the whole of the united Church, and with those which affect the relation of the dioceses one to another and to the rest of the universal Church, and shall leave the Diocesan Councils to deal with the internal affairs of each diocese."

The real strength of the Church will therefore be in the diocese (see Chapter 8 p. 38 of the *Scheme*) and above all in the local congregation (see Chapter 5. p. 26 of the *Scheme*.)

7. Will a non-Anglican minority be able to dominate an Anglican majority, especially in the matter of electing diocesan bishops?

The method by which the first diocesan bishops of the United Church will be chosen and appointed is given on pages 54-55 of the *Scheme*. There will be an electoral body of thirty six people, twelve from each of the three uniting churches, and they will proceed to elect and appoint the first bishops for the Church. Paragraph 3.b (IV) (p. 55) reads:

"In the selection and appointment of diocesan bishops the central electoral body shall take into account the numerical strengths of the uniting churches, so as to secure a fair representation of each in the episcopate."

If, then, to give an example, there are twice as many ex-Anglicans as there are ex-Methodists, then there will at the beginning be twice as many ex-Anglican bishops as there are ex-Methodist ones. And further not only is the proportion of ex-Anglican bishops laid down, but it is also provided that, in choosing from the Anglican list, special attention is to be paid to the views of the Anglicans on the electoral body.

This method is only to be used when the Church is first formed. There will be an entirely different system afterwards, which is described on pp. 32-34 of the *Scheme*.

It is natural for people to ask questions of this kind, yet the question shows a wrong attitude. We should not be thinking of the bodies which existed before the union struggling for power. Let us think rather of fellow Christians, working together for something new in the power of the Holy Spirit.

8. We have a wonderful heritage in the historic succession of bishops from Christ and His apostles; a disciplined Church Order which allows individual freedom of thought; and the sure ministry of Word and Sacraments. Are we to throw all this away? We say in the Creeds that we believe in the *Catholic Church*. Shall we have to cut that out?

The answer to both questions is: "Of course not!" It is important to emphasise again that we are not leaving our Anglican heritage behind (let alone throwing it away) when we enter the United Church. In the same way the Methodists and Presbyterians will add to their own heritage what they gain from us and from one another.

It is just not true to suggest that the United Church will *not* preserve the historical succession of bishops, a disciplined church order allowing freedom, or a sure ministry of Word and Sacraments. The following sections of the *Scheme* cover these points, and make clear what is intended:

The Historic Episcopate — p. 20 (paragraph 12)

Valid Ordination and Sacraments — p. 36 (paragraph 5)

Freedom of Opinion on Debatable Matters — p. 15 (paragraph 16)

The Lambeth Conference Committee (1958) speaking of the Ceylon Scheme and North India Plan (which have been the model for the Nigerian Scheme) states on these matters:

"*The Lambeth Conference of 1948 set forth certain principles to guide further progress towards Church Unity. It is noted that these principles have been followed.*"¹

The idea in the mind of some people is that union with Methodists and Presbyterians means that in the interests of unity the Anglican Church takes, as it were, a step to the left, and the other two Churches take one to the right. Thus they meet together and form a new "Pan-Protestant" Church, from which most "catholic" elements have been removed.

¹ Lambeth Report 1958 p.2/31.

People who think like this will be surprised to know what certain Roman Catholic students of Liturgy have said about the Church of South India. They have expressed the view that this Church has one of the purest liturgies in the world, and one which is very near to that used in the Early Church¹. The Church of South India is centred on Liturgy and the Word in accordance with the earliest Church tradition, to which it is trying to return. It is the intention of the Church of Nigeria to return to great Catholic principles of the early Church in the same way. More will be said about the meaning of the term *catholic* in Part II of this booklet (see p. 23).

It is our hope that we shall be able to describe the Church of Nigeria in the same terms which Bishop Palmer applied to the Church of South India:

"Not a new Church, but the old, undivided Church given a new life."

Reunion does not mean a muddling together of all the different church traditions since the Reformation. It means an attempt to submit ourselves afresh, in the light of new knowledge, to the pattern of the Church in the Bible and Early Church period. We hope it will be true in this case that, as a French Roman Catholic writer has put it:

"The reunion of the Church will be an advance upon the situation found before the divisions took place."

Today all the Churches within the ecumenical movement are rediscovering together the fullness of the Catholic Church of the first centuries. For example, modern developments in the Church of Scotland show that ex-Presbyterians in the United Church may well have a great deal to teach ex-Anglicans about the nature of the Catholic Church.

¹ See Father Leeming's book *The Church and the Churches*.

9. Why do we need visible, structural union? It will need a lot of time and effort to bring it about. Won't this take our minds and energies away from our real Christian tasks in this country? Surely all true Christians are already united in the "invisible Church". Isn't that inward, spiritual union enough?

Obviously it does matter to Anglicans. For if it is enough that all true Christians are already united in the "invisible Church", why do we say to some of those true Christians that they may not kneel with us at Holy Communion and share with us the bread and wine?

The Bible too is quite certain that visible union matters. In the Old Testament, God called Israel to be the bearer of His revelation to the nations. In the unity and obedience of Israel men were to see the oneness and glory of God. Hence the horror caused by the idea of a divided kingdom, and the emphasis on the wickedness of the Northern Kingdom, leading to its final rejection. There could be only one Israel.

The Church, the New Israel, was based on the twelve apostles, corresponding to the twelve patriarchs who were the foundation of the old. Jesus Christ became visible Man in order to reveal to men the invisible God. And so it was God's plan that the visible Church should show to men that unity of all believers in Christ which no man-made divisions can destroy. The Bible never speaks of the "invisible Church" — only of the visible, structural Church as it appears in the world before the eyes of men.

Before His death our Lord prayed that His followers might be one, so that through their unity the world might believe that He had come from God¹. The world would believe when it saw their (visible) unity. And when the Spirit came upon them at Pentecost, they were made into a visible Church. They were made one.²

In his letters to the churches, St. Paul labours to help the Christians to demonstrate their spiritual unity in Christ by their outward unity. They were to be like limbs of one body, in which there could be no division. "Is Christ divided?" he asks.³ None of the New Testament writers ever speaks

1. John 17. 21

2. Acts 2 44-47.

3. I Cor. 1. 13

as if the Church were only an invisible reality. They are wholly concerned with the actual physical fact, the community, the people of God. To be separated from that Community is to be "delivered to Satan".¹

This remains true for the first three centuries of the Church's life. Over all that time not a single writer ever conceived it possible that the Church should be divided into different organizations with different messages. Anyone who broke with the visible organized Church, or who was excommunicated from it, ceased to be "in Christ". It was after the Church was established under Constantine, in the fourth century, that the idea of the invisible Church came in. It was originally introduced as a means of making it easier for those who had broken with the rest of the Church to return. But it was soon used as an excuse to be complacent about outward divisions, to cease even trying to come together. As a result the more spiritual Christians stopped worrying much about the outward Church, and it became a large, rather worldly institution.

Judged by the Bible, it is wrong to emphasise either aspect of the Church more than the other. We must care both for the outward form of the Church, which is to be the visible Body of Christ, and for the spiritual life of that Church and all its members, so that our witness to Christ may be complete.

Individual Christians may indeed find deep spiritual unity with others who belong to a different denomination. But how does it all look to the outsider? He may well ask how people can claim to have the secret of unity between God and man (and therefore between man and man), while they themselves are divided into rival, and often conflicting, bodies. So our divisions may contradict our message. And our unity, far from keeping us from more important things, will help us to witness to the truth of what we proclaim — that Christ unites men and women of different races and tribes and backgrounds, and that His Church is a fellowship where all who believe in Him can find peace and brotherhood.

1. I Cor. 5. 5.

10. Those in favour of Church Union constantly refer us to the Church of South India. But what evidence is there that the experiment there has been successful? How far has the Anglican contribution been accepted?

Probably the best way of answering this one is to quote from the Report of the Lambeth Conference of 1958. This Report outlined the history of the first ten years of the Church of South India. The Committee on Church Unity and the Church Universal gave its verdict on the Church of South India, which was endorsed by the entire Conference (see Resolution 18):

"This (Report) is a plain record of the facts of the way in which the life of the Church of South India has developed, and of its relation to the provinces of the Anglican Communion. It does not call sufficient attention to the really significant aspects of growth in that Church within the last ten years."

"The United Report of the two Joint Committees of the Convocations of Canterbury and York was accepted by those Convocations in 1955. It contains this passage:-

"We feel sure that the Church of South India has grown in its inner unity and in its sacramental life. Members are coming to appreciate more the office of the bishop in the Church of God. It helps them to realise the unity of the Church now, and its connection with the whole Church throughout the ages. Liturgical worship is spreading, as is shown by the Orders of Service for the Holy Communion, Baptism and Confirmation issued by the Synod. There is a growing use of the rite of Confirmation administered by the bishop. This service is not compulsory, yet because of the truth it contains, and the way it appeals to the people, it is becoming more and more popular even in areas of the Church where it was unfamiliar."

"There is also evidence from many sources to show that people are learning to appreciate the pastoral side of the bishop's work. It may well be that the Church of

South India can help the Church in the West to return more closely to the pattern of episcopacy found in the Early Church—the idea of the bishop as Father in God.”¹

¹ This quotation is paraphrased in places, but gives the full meaning of the original.

11. Is it right that we should let the Anglican Church, as we know and love it in Nigeria, die? Is not this the time for strengthening rather than breaking up, and for standing fast as faithful Anglicans?

The Lambeth Conference Committee on Church Unity and the Church Universal has this to say on page 24 of its Report:

"We believe it to be the vocation of our Communion to be ready to merge its own separate existence in different parts of the world in the wider unity of a Church both Catholic and Reformed."

The paragraph goes on to speak of "*the churches of our Communion believing themselves called by God to carry their Anglican heritage into a United Church.*"

We are not leaving our Anglican tradition behind when we enter the United Church. All the things that are of Christ — episcopacy, sacraments, tradition, go with us. This has been the official view of our Church ever since the Lambeth Appeal of 1920.¹

Anglicans are being led to the view that Anglicanism is being most useful to Christ when it is leading the way to something greater than itself. This is surely the only way to interpret the conclusions of the last Lambeth Conference.

¹ *The Lambeth Appeal to all Christian People* was issued after the Lambeth Conference of 1920. Ever since then Anglicans have accepted it as the basis and inspiration of all movement towards Church Union.

12. Why should we break up the Province of West Africa after only ten years?

The Synod of the Province of West Africa, meeting in Lagos in August 1962, gave full consideration to this question which is obviously one of supreme importance to Anglicans. Here is the resolution passed unanimously by the Synod:

The Provincial Synod, having heard and discussed a Report of the present position in regard to Church Union in Nigeria, records the following points of agreement:

- (a) *That we are thankful to God for the continuing progress being made towards Union by the Nigeria Church Union Committee;*
- (b) *That we encourage Anglican Representatives of the Committee to continue the planning of the future United Church of Nigeria, and pray for God's Blessing upon the work of the Committee;*
- (c) *That, should the Committee and the participating Churches reach the point of inauguration of a United Church before this Synod meets again, we (realising that the Nigerian Dioceses which decide to enter the United Church will, at the time of its inauguration, cease to be part of the Church of the Province of West Africa) intend that all the remaining dioceses of the Province shall be in full Communion with the United Church; provided that the Consultative Committee of the Lambeth Conference recommends this course of action.*
- (d) *The Synod, therefore, records its full confidence in those appointed to represent the participating Dioceses and prays that the Synods of these Dioceses may be guided by the Holy Spirit in their final decision in regard to entering the United Church.*

In passing this resolution the Province makes clear that it recognises that Anglicanism is in itself only a stage on the way to something greater. If and when the Anglican Church in Ghana enters into a scheme of union, as now seems very possible, this will be even more apparent.

13. Obviously we Anglicans have a big contribution to make to the United Church. But what are we going to gain that we have not already got? It may sound selfish to put it like this, but doesn't it look as though we are going to be the losers in the new venture?

Perhaps it does sound selfish! And we shall think about our basic attitude to these matters in Part II of this booklet. But these questions are in people's minds and must be faced. Also it is not wrong to "count the cost" before committing ourselves to such a serious step. So let us try to find an honest answer.

The first answer is that we shall "lose" nothing that we ought not to lose — unless such adjustments as the sub-dividing of our present dioceses is regarded as "loss". We shall retain our creeds, our orders (of clergy), our worship, our traditions and even our church property. We may indeed have to lose our tendency to shut others out and to think of ourselves as a "better" Church than others. We shall have to get rid of any inherited inclination to resist change and growth. And we shall certainly lose our present over-great concern for our own Anglican Communion. The United Church is pledged to look beyond itself to other denominations and to the world outside, far more than we are doing at present. But it really isn't true to speak of Anglicans as being the "chief losers", for we shall be giving up no part of the true treasure of our heritage. Moreover, although we shall have many changes and adjustments to make, we shall not have to face any major change of principle — unlike the Methodists and Presbyterians who, for example, have agreed to accept episcopacy.

As for what we shall gain, or for that matter what Presbyterians and Methodists will gain, that of course depends on how far we are willing to be changed. Let us face the fact that any real gain is not going to be realised all at once. For some time after the inauguration of the United Church there may be very little apparent change indeed, especially in areas where there are no Methodist or Presbyterian churches at all, only Anglican ones! Perhaps all that we shall notice

at first will be a new sense of expectancy, a new spirit of enthusiasm. But as the new Church develops we shall certainly gain a great deal. We shall gain from the Methodist and Presbyterian forms of worship and systems of church government which are at present strange to us. We shall gain by sharing in the wisdom and insight of their leaders and theologians. But our main gain will not be what we get *from* the ex-Methodists and ex-Presbyterians, but what we discover together *with* them.

If South India is any guide, we shall discover a new form of the Holy Communion Service which is much richer than that which any of us enjoy at present, and which will become much more central in our church life. We shall feel freer to make our forms of worship, and our theology, more African. This is a process which as yet has scarcely begun, and which is certainly in great need of encouragement. Part II of this booklet in fact describes some of the things the three participating churches can hope to gain together. It may be summed up as the hope that we shall each go on from our present denominational positions to discover a new life and a new spiritual power which none of us has been able to find separately.

God grant that we may indeed grow together in this way.

14. How can we go into a United Church when the average Anglican member knows nothing about it?

It is certainly true that there are many parts of the country where the Anglican members are almost entirely ignorant of the *Scheme*. This is a most serious situation, and much to be regretted. The fact that it is probably largely true of Methodists and Presbyterians also does not make it any better. The Churches in the East have been negotiating for thirty years, and the rest of the country for sixteen. If we do believe that union is God's will for our three Churches, how much more time do we need to prepare to obey the leading of God? This is not a criticism of the Church of Nigeria. It is a criticism of ourselves who have waited till we are face to face with the possibility of moving into a United Church before seriously considering what it will mean. Those who have been present at our Diocesan Synods over the years will know how little consideration has ever been given to Church Union in our discussions.

When the Church Union Committee met in March 1963, some of its members were anxious to press for the end of 1964 as the target date for the formation of the new Church. It was because they realized how much is still to be done in preparing our members that our Archbishop, and the majority of the Anglican delegates, said that this was too soon. They considered that a further year of preparation would be needed.

Not that it is necessary for every member to be acquainted with the constitutional details of the *Scheme*. The average Anglican knew very little about the Province of West Africa and its constitution before going into it, and we have not suffered as a result. But *all* members can know, and ought to know, the reasons why we are proposing to unite and the hopes we have for our united Church after unity is achieved.

Yet there is a limit to the time that should be devoted to preparation. The target date was decided upon in March, 1963, allowing two years and nine months for preparation. If that is not long enough, how long *do* people want! If we were to go on delaying beyond the right time, how easy it

would be for more and more irrelevant obstacles to appear in our path. There might be local jealousies, denominational suspicions, suggestions of false motives, and so on. People whose interest and enthusiasm had been raised would become discouraged. And other factors might well develop which would drive the three Churches apart once more, so that the hour of opportunity would pass us by.

Preparation is clearly essential. The importance of this is stressed below (pp. 26-27). But it is also important to remember that the inauguration of a United Church is a *beginning*, and only a beginning, to be followed by a long period of "growing into unity". Thus the argument that many Anglicans as yet know so little about the proposed Church of Nigeria, is not an argument for postponing union. It is an argument in favour of spending the next two years in urgent and most thorough teaching and explanation.

PART II.

A CHALLENGE TO THINK MORE DEEPLY

We have tried to answer some of the questions and criticisms which people have voiced about the Scheme of Union from the Anglican point of view. But now it is important that those of us who are proposing to join the Church of Nigeria should get down to serious study of the principles which underlie the Scheme. We must be ready for the discipline of some hard thinking.

Union — the work of the Holy Spirit

There are deeper questions at issue than any we have so far touched upon. Some of the criticisms we have been dealing with are symptoms of a certain basic attitude. This attitude is inconsistent with the whole spirit of the ecumenical movement, with church union of any kind, and indeed with Anglicanism itself. Let us examine what our basic attitude should be.

From the beginning, the movement towards church union has borne all the marks of the work of the Holy Spirit within the Church. It has been welcomed as such by Christians of many different kinds, from the very 'high church' to the very 'low church'.¹ When the movement is true to itself, it springs from an honest attempt to discover the will of God, to know the mind of Christ, and to serve Him. Jesus Christ, our Lord and King, is making a demand upon His Church. The movement towards church union is our effort to respond to this demand by the power of the Holy Spirit. All genuine steps towards church union must be taken with our eyes fixed upon Christ.

1 Put briefly, the term *low church* is taken to refer to those Anglicans and others who follow the evangelical (or protestant) tradition, with its special emphasis on personal conversion, the Bible, and simplicity in church buildings and methods of worship (as the majority of Anglicans in Nigeria do.) *High church* Anglicans place more emphasis on the importance of the sacraments, the ministry, and beauty and ritual in buildings and worship. This branch of the Anglican Church is sometimes called *catholic* (or Anglo-catholic) because it holds to the faith and practices taught by the Early Church. (See below, where the term *catholic* is more fully defined on p. 27). The Anglicans in Ghana and Gambia on the whole follow this tradition.

By contrast, the attitude revealed by some of these questions we have dealt with does not appear to be centred in Christ. It is so fatally easy for all of us to put our own fears, plans and prejudices into the first place. We begin to be more concerned with preserving our own denomination than with building up the whole body of Christ. We begin to put not Christ, but Anglicanism, at the centre. That is, we begin to want Anglicanism for its own sake. This is most definitely NOT the true Anglican position.

A call to be Catholic rather than Anglican

There have been times in the past when it was necessary for Anglican leaders to fight for what they felt to be their true heritage. They fought against those who, like the Puritans, did not understand it and wished to destroy it. But today we are not involved with people who wish to destroy catholic truth. Rather we are brought nearer to others with whom we can join in the search for true catholicity.

Here perhaps we should pause to consider in what sense we are using the term *catholic*. A helpful way of defining it is: "Existing before the great division of the one Church into the Eastern and Western Churches, which took place in 1054 A.D." (see the pamphlet *Catholicity*, published by the Dacre Press).

The main things which existed in the undivided Church and which, owing to division, have so often become distorted, are:

1. The form of the Holy Communion Service, and its position at the very centre of the Church's life, with all that that implies.
2. The Church Order of Bishop, Presbyter, Deacon and Laity, shown so clearly in the part each took in the Holy Communion Service of those days.
3. The way each of these four depended on the others: the Bishop *in* his Church, ruling *through* his Presbyters, and the Clergy and Laity working in unity, each with their part to

play. As Anglicans we have tended to isolate the bishops and the clergy from the laity, and to separate the bishop from the church as a whole, instead of thinking of him as working through it. When the Scheme of Union suggests not calling the bishop 'my lord', it is not in any desire to lessen the respect due to bishops. It is in order to bring out the true character of his office as a constitutional leader.

4. The Church based on the Scriptures, and the Scriptures read and interpreted in the Church. After the great division into East and West, the Bible and the Church became separated. After the Reformation, Christians tended to emphasise *either* the Bible *or* the Church as being supreme. As Anglicans, many of us do not take the Bible nearly as seriously as, for instance, the Lutherans and Calvinists, although we like to think we do.

These are things which all denominations are seeking to discover afresh. In our Church we are beginning to get to the very place which the great Anglican leaders of the seventeenth century were trying to reach. They were seeking to build a Church that was true to the Bible and to the teaching of the Fathers. And this, we believe, will be the pattern of the Church of the future.

One of the finest representatives in our time of the high church tradition was Bishop E. J. Palmer, who for many years took a leading part in the negotiations for union in South India. He expressed the true Anglican attitude for today in these words:

"It has been my practice all through the negotiations to insist on nothing that is purely Anglican. Whatever I have urged has been catholic, in the sense that it existed before our divisions." (Quoted by Bengt Sundkler in *The Church of South India: the Movement towards Church Union*. 1954).

Losing our life — or trying to save it?

All those concerned with church union should be reading *The Household of God* by Bishop Lesslie Newbigin of the Church of South India. In this great book the bishop makes

it plain that all true church union leads us to share in the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have to *die* to our self-concern, to our immediate desire to preserve what is ours. And we have to *rise* to a new, larger life with the Lord. We have to *die* to our own denomination, and our fight to preserve it at all costs. And we have to *rise* to life in a new Church, more fully conformed to Christ. We have to give up our instinct to hold on to what we have, and be ready to be brought into something far greater. Christians in the Church of South India have experienced the joy of "losing the life" of their old denomination to save it; to find it again enriched and fulfilled in the new Church.

But such an attitude does not come naturally to most of us. Our fear, perhaps unspoken, is that we shall lose too much if we join this larger Church. Perhaps we shall not have enough say in how things are done. Perhaps we shall not be sufficiently prominent! This human side of us cries out: "Cling to our mother church at all costs. Shrink from giving up what we have!"

This way of thinking is understandable. But it is surely far from the call of Christ which is being heard more and more clearly in churches all over the world. It is quite different from what Anglicans have been saying in Asia, and in England itself. It contradicts not only Anglicanism but also the finest Christian thinking of today, in the Roman communion as well as in the Protestant churches. It is false to the Gospel itself.

The New Vision

The truth is that all over the world Christians in our time have been given a new vision of the real nature of the Church, and of what it may become in practice. When Archbishop William Temple spoke of the Ecumenical Movement as "the great new fact of our time", he was referring to this vision.

Things have happened in our time which Christians in the last century could only dream of:- a spirit of love and co-operation among the churches; the growth of mutual understanding; the liturgical movement; the movement of prayer

for church unity; the Biblical theology movement; the rediscovery of the doctrine of the Church; the World Council of Churches; Inter-Church Aid; the great gathering at New Delhi, where Africans and Asians played such a prominent part — these are wonderful advances. The life and witness of Pope John XXIII and the Ecumenical Council of the Roman Church were expressions of this same movement of the Spirit. Even in Europe, where divisions have hardened for so long, Christians in many denominations have been shaken out of their old habits and ways of thought. In Africa and Asia the young churches have been showing the way forward.

Christ the Centre of the Church

What is this new vision which Christians are being given? Is it just a vision of South India, or of Church Union in Nigeria? No. It is a newer and greater vision of Jesus Christ Himself. *Christ* must be at the centre of our Church — not 'I', nor 'us', nor 'Anglicanism'. But Christ. Naturally each denomination already thinks that Christ *is* the centre of their own church. But in fact it is necessary to watch constantly that He is not being displaced, or He very quickly ceases to be at the centre, except in theory.

To speak thus of Christ as the *centre* is not to use emotional words with little meaning. In practical terms it means bringing together our denominations; revising our church worship; reshaping our church order; renewing and planning again our church life. And in all this we must not be guided by our preferences and prejudices. We must be guided by the continuing calls of Christ to us to sacrifice our self-interest, and to take up our cross and follow Him.

A Challenge to our Complacency

There is at present a real danger that we may be approaching this great movement of union without a spirit of true dedication and surrender to Christ. It may be that critics of the Scheme are in danger of complacency about our divisions. But those of us who are involved in the union must beware of complacency about union.

The great danger in either case is that we should put our faith in our own works, or denomination, or even in the union itself. We need to come to God in penitence and ask him to make something new. Do any of us, even those who are working for union, really believe that God is going to give us something completely new? Or are we just thinking of the merging together of old denominations without much change taking place? The *Scheme of Union* calls us to a complete change in our thinking, especially of the place of the congregation in the life of the Church. Faith is just as much necessary for the salvation of the Church as it is for the salvation of the individual.

What we have to learn to do, and to teach people to do, is not just to understand any man-made scheme, but to wait upon God. It would be encouraging if, in every area, we could see members of the different churches meeting regularly and frequently for study of the *Scheme* followed by prayer about it. This is the sort of thing which would convince those outside the Scheme that there is going to be a revival. Then if union comes, and the provisions of the *Scheme* have been really grasped, what an opportunity we shall have for a great revival in congregational life!

Church union should be leading us to the Spirit-filled, Christ-centred community, not to a newer and bigger organization. For where there is knowledge, and understanding, and a sincere desire to share to the full in this union which comes from God alone, then we can expect to receive a quickening of the spirit throughout our whole Church. We can look for the power of the Spirit to make the vision a reality. "*No reunion without renewal*" should be our slogan now. If we claim that the proposed union is truly the will and gift of God, then let us take far more serious and urgent steps to prepare ourselves and our people in heart and mind to receive it.

We want to make it quite clear that *this booklet is not intended mainly as an answer to critics or to others asking questions about the Scheme. Even more it is an earnest challenge to the supporters of union to publicise it, to understand and to pray for it, with our eyes upon our dying and risen Lord.*

New Opportunities

If we do this, we can be sure that He Who is faithful will bring out of this union a Church which will attract even those who are at present critical of it. When they see a real vision of Christ amongst us, they will recognise more easily that this new Church is something not of our own manufacture, but of His creation.

And we shall discover great things together, as people in South India have done. Visitors to South India have said that when they attended the Holy Communion Service where the new order of service was followed, they experienced the meaning of it as they never had before. They found in it a new experience of Christ's presence. They also found that the new Church Order, in which bishop, presbyter, deacon and laity all had their special part to play, brought alive the New Testament idea of the Church as the Body of Christ.

In the same way, as we share our understanding of the Scriptures, our money, our ideas and our manpower, we may also be given a richer understanding of Christ and His Gospel, and of how we may serve Him together. The important thing is not so much that we become a stronger organization, but that we should put ourselves more completely at the disposal of our Master. This might mean, for instance, that we should be led to spend more time and money than most churches do at present on evangelism, and on helping those in need. One of the great opportunities this new sharing of our spiritual and material resources will give us is the chance of truly indigenizing the Church. Indeed, the new opportunities of serving Christ in Nigeria which we shall be given in this united Church are surely endless.

May He give us grace and wisdom to grasp them.

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